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Tribute to a spy-master

Allen W. Dulles, who died this week at 75, was not the first director of the Central Intelligence Agency but it was largely of his shaping.

President Nixon's tribute mentioned the most striking aspects of Mr. Dulles and his career.

"He was a man," Mr. Nixon said, "who brought civility, intelligence and great dedication to everything he did. He served his country in the great tradition of his family and with unstinting devotion to duty."

That family tradition was one he shared with his brother, the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. A great-uncle had been an ambassador to Britain in the Hayes Administration, a grandfather Secretary of State in Benjamin Harrison's Administration, and an in-law Secretary of State in the Wilson Administration.

He himself, like his brother, had been a lawyer and diplomat. His successes in the Office of Strategic Services during World War II led to his later career at the center of American espionage.

Of that career, Mr. Nixon said: "In the nature of his task, his achievements were known to only a few. But — because of him — the world is a safer place today."

The burgeoning development of the

CIA in the postwar years was looked askance by some Americans. It was the kind of operation and on a scale that seemed foreign to American "peacetime" ways. Its failures were highly publicized. There was fear its "meddling" in foreign countries would undermine declared U. S. policies; that its secrecy and what was regarded as a lack of proper accountability enabled it to function as a sinister "hidden government."

But while some criticisms of CIA operations had merit, and the Bay of Pigs fiasco brought the agency under tighter wraps and closer surveillance itself, only the most naive doubted the necessity for its existence.

American safety, the soundness of American policy, depends on knowing, not just what others in this dangerous world are saying, but as accurately as possible what they are doing or are about to do.

A President's words must attest to the value of Mr. Dulles' own contributions while he headed the agency. He was more publicized than most intelligence chieftains but even so, as the President said, his achievements were necessarily "known to few."

The nation's adversaries could echo that.